Youth 'Creating, Giving, Doing'

A Research Report on Youth-led Granting in Nova Scotia

YouthScape HRM distributing a youth-led community grant

A report prepared by:
HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development

For the:
Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat

Written and compiled by: Anna Haanstra
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1.0 Executive Summary

The Youth Secretariat of Nova Scotia identified a need to capture and understand provincial activities of youth-led granting as a way to engage young people in their communities. HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development has created this report by reviewing literature on youth-led granting, conducting a scan of youth-led granting activities in the province, and interviewing program coordinators/facilitators, youth selection team members and youth grant recipients. The input, expertise, feedback and perspectives provided by these main stakeholders have informed the content of this report.

> *"A big part of the Emergency Response Dance Crew's (E.R.D.C.) success is because of Carlos' leadership, which has become recognized in the Dartmouth North Community. It is very clear how much Carlos cares about his community and is proud to be a mentor to other youth. However, it is not just other youth who look up to him. Many adults in the community admire and respect Carlos and appreciate his dedication.*
>
> *Carlos, age 17, credits YouthScape for being the first to believe in his idea and trust him with funds to support his youth-led community project."*
>
> ***Grant Recipient, YouthScape HRM***

The purpose of this report is to map out current activities in Nova Scotia and to understand the approaches, impacts, considerations and best practices of youth-led granting in the province. There are three main youth-led granting initiatives in Nova Scotia that will be used as case studies for this report, coordinated through:

- **United Way of Halifax Region**
- **United Way of Pictou County**
- **YouthScape HRM**

Each of these initiatives is at a different stage of development, ranging from initial visioning to completion. Informed by these initiatives, this report will use the term *youth-led granting* and descriptively define it as "youth to youth granting as an expression of youth development that is purposeful and appreciative in its inclusion of youth as decision-makers, leaders and insightful contributors to the distribution of grants for youth-related initiatives."

What emerges from a review of these three initiatives is the willingness of youth to become involved in their communities and their desire to have a voice in decision-making that is respected and heard. Youth-led granting offers youth a forum to communicate their priorities, voice the needs of their communities and peers, and a way to *take action*. By being involved in the stages of 'creating, giving and doing', youth-led granting deepens the learning for youth and offers experience in establishing criteria, budgeting, evaluation, decision-making and meaningful youth-adult partnership. Most importantly, youth-led granting encourages engagement of youth with a wide range of community members and networks. It is worth highlighting, as research across North America has, that the benefits of youth-led granting extend far beyond the youth involved in the project to families, communities and peer groups.

Provincially, youth-led grants have funded projects related to art/music, environment, social causes, sports/recreation and personal growth. A key lesson of this research is that the interests of youth act as the primary catalyst for action. Youth-led granting can therefore be the connector that links youth passions to an outlet for action.

A key lesson identified in this research report is the need for youth-led granting initiatives to be guided by the realities and contexts of the local communities. This report reflects localized experiences in Nova Scotia. While the provincial context is important, this report provides a set of guidelines and best practices that are flexible and adaptable to the voices, experiences and priorities of young people in any given community.

The best practices identified in this research are:

- **Build an understanding of youth in your community**
- **Be flexible and adaptable**
- **Build genuine youth-adult partnerships**
- **Build on potential**
- **Encourage creativity**
- **Promote meaningful inclusion and contributions**
- **Plan for sustainability**

This report concludes with a shortlist of seven (7) recommendations for the provincial Youth Secretariat's consideration. The seven points are as follows:

- **Promote youth-led granting as a valuable *form* of youth engagement**
- **Showcase the youth-led grants as a *portrayal* of positive civic engagement**
- **Create a provincially funded youth-friendly guide for youth-led granting**
- **Create a youth engagement assessment tool specific to youth-led granting**
- **Create a youth-led grant fund**
- **Consult with youth**
- **Build community capacity**

Youth-led granting is a unique and meaningful form of youth engagement. The three case studies have demonstrated that often with small sums of money, youth are able to accomplish comprehensive initiatives and build informal and relevant networks and skills that further youth development. Youth-led granting builds for young people extensive resumes of skills that promote leadership and collaborative decision-making. Built into the practice of youth-led granting, youths' involvement at one stage naturally promotes participation among their peers at the next stage. Youth-led granting automatically incorporates peer support, which as HeartWood identifies, is central to community youth development. Youth-led granting helps organizations and communities identify barriers to youth engagement as well as their motivations for participation. While the process of youth-led grants is of utmost importance to the value of the initiative, each stage of participation also produces particular outcomes that create ripples into the young people's peer groups, communities, schools and homes.

2.0 Introduction

Youth-led granting has taken off in various communities across Canada starting in the late 1990s, after being active in the USA since the mid-1980s. Nova Scotia's first well-documented and marketed experience with youth-led granting was undertaken in 2007 by YouthScape HRM, convened by HeartWood.

To better support the vibrant, diverse and energized youth population in Nova Scotia, the Youth Secretariat wishes to capture current activities, strategies and best practices around youth-led granting in Nova Scotia. For over 20 years HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development has acted as a central agency for the delivery of youth programming and consultation on youth engagement province wide. HeartWood has conducted numerous research projects, both provincial and national, during the past 10 years (www.heartwood.ns.ca/resources.shtml). Through funding from the Youth Secretariat, HeartWood has conducted interviews, research and analyses of youth-led granting in Nova Scotia and compiled *Youth 'Creating, Giving, Doing': A Research Report on Youth-led Granting in Nova Scotia.*

Meaningful and respectful inclusion of youth in community development requires creativity, openness and above all, a belief in youth as capacity builders and as assets to the wellbeing of communities. Youth-led granting, or youth philanthropy, is one such innovative expression of youth-centered community development approaches. Youth-led granting positions youth as knowledgeable and capable decision-makers and allows youth to contribute both insight and direction into identifying priorities and needs of youth in their communities.

2.1 Report Overview

This report offers a scan of youth-led granting activities that are occurring in the province of Nova Scotia, captured through research, interviews, focus groups and/or discussions with three main stakeholders 1) organizations that administer youth-led grants, 2) youth selection committee participants, or 'grant-makers' and 3) youth grant recipients. Provincially, youth-led granting activities are occurring at various stages of development, ranging from initial visioning to completed grant cycles. This report includes activities at any stage of this spectrum in order to understand how youth-led granting is unfolding in Nova Scotia and the emerging best practices.

This report begins by defining youth-led granting, followed by a summary of three main initiatives in Nova Scotia. An introductory review of activities and literature in Canada and the United States is outlined. Section 4.0 discusses approaches and strategies for engaging youth in youth-led granting. Section 5.0 reviews the impacts of youth-led grants as seen in Nova Scotia to grant-makers, grant recipients, communities and facilitating organizations. The sixth section discusses key lessons identified from these initiatives, and summarizes several strengths and challenges, concluding with a discussion of the caveats of funding sources. The final section outlines seven (7) Best

Practices and provides a shortlist of seven (7) recommendations for moving forward. The conclusion highlights key points and lessons learned from the research. A list of references and resources, as well as relevant contact information, conclude the report.

2.2 What is Youth-led Granting?

Youth-led granting, sometimes referred to as youth philanthropy, has been defined in a variety of ways. However, unlike youth philanthropy, youth-led granting specifically involves youth as decision-makers in the process of awarding grants. Conversely, youth philanthropy encompasses grants and can also include volunteerism, donations or fundraising endeavors.

Youth-led granting can be defined as concisely as "programs or initiatives in which youth develop knowledge of and participate in the formal practice of philanthropy, specifically grant-making" (Youth Leadership Institute 2002: 12). While this definition explains what is involved in practice it overlooks how youth-led granting encompasses many principles of community youth development such as civic engagement, leadership, appreciative inclusion and public service.

For the purposes of this report we will use the term youth-led granting and descriptively define it as "youth to youth granting as an expression of youth development that is purposeful and appreciative in its inclusion of youth as decision-makers, leaders and insightful contributors to the distribution of grants for youth-related initiatives". While the province of Nova Scotia has numerous programs that offer grants *to* youth, youth-led granting rethinks this approach and extends the benefits of youth participation and leadership to all stages of the granting cycle and encourages reciprocal youth-adult partnership.

Youth-led granting is commonly hosted by a convening body, such as United Way, a youth-serving organization or a foundation. Money is earmarked from a particular funding pool, or a youth programming budget, for a granting committee with youth-focused initiatives. In the province these funding pools range between $5,000 and $70,000. By involving youth throughout the granting cycle, i.e. in the "creating, giving and doing" (Sabrina Poirier, YouthScape HRM Coordinator), the contribution and benefits to the community prove that a little bit of innovation and small amounts of money can go a long way.

With youth-led grants the convening organization creates a youth selection committee or a youth and adult selection committee as a decision-making body. This selection committee may work from existing granting criteria or may develop its own criteria and application process as a way of deepening the learning component of the initiative. This stage allows for youth members to voice the priorities and needs of their peers– integrating youth into the role of visionary both in their roles as decision-makers and as project creators.

The actual selection process involves the committee accepting, amending or referring the grant applications that have been submitted. This has proven to be a time for creative problem solving and decision-making. For the committee members, getting funds to the recipients involves communication, evaluation, and reporting. Often youth are paired with an adult mentor. Youth-led-grants are about creating linkages between the passions of youth and the broader community and allowing youth to lead this process.

Supporting partners may include various forms of community members such as schools, teachers, youth leaders, family, community groups and clubs. For example, in Pictou County it was found that ".for many youth school *is* their community. So start there and link them to the larger community" (Dodie Goodwin, Executive Director, United Way of Pictou County).

3.0 A Scan of Current Activities

3.1 Nova Scotia: A provincial scan

In HeartWood's scan of youth-led granting activities in Nova Scotia, three initiatives, at various stages of development, were identified:

- United Way of Halifax Region
- United Way of Pictou County
- YouthScape HRM

The following is a brief description and outline of the three initiatives, including a summary of the ways information was gathered from the three initiatives.

3.1.1 United Way of Halifax Region

The idea for the 'Youth Grants Team' initiative through the United Way of Halifax Region was solidified in the organization's 2007 experience of involving youth on a selection team for community grants through United Way's *Action for Neighbourhood Change* in Spryfield, Nova Scotia. Seeing the value of having a youth voice and perspective when selecting grant recipients sparked an interest in intentionally positioning youth as decision-makers on a grants committee. Five thousand dollars out of a private donation of $10 000 for youth programming was earmarked for youth-led granting. This seed money provided Caitlin Power Hancey, the Community Facilitator for United Way, an opportunity to build momentum. Since November 2008 Caitlin has worked to assemble a Youth Grants Team comprised of 12 'young people', ages 15-23, ten females and two males, with two youth under 18.

The Youth Grants Team is currently developing the application criteria and processes. So far, after much constructive debate, the decision has been made to accept applications

for individuals up to the age of 23.[1] The maximum amount of the grant will be $500 and applications will be simple and straightforward with follow-up phone calls as the means to offer specific details to applicants. This initiative is independent from United Way's other work, which provides greater autonomy. The intent of this project is to provide a foundation for youth-led projects and a means to connect youth with United Way. As a sustainability measure, the Youth Grant Team has requested and been approved for a matching annual fund from United Way in future budgets. Grant applications are set for April 2009, with grant distribution planned for the summer.

The Community Facilitator of the Youth Grant Team was interviewed for this report. (See Appendix 1.0- Guiding Interview Questions)

3.1.2 United Way of Pictou County

Initiated in October 2008, the 'Youth-Grant Makers' project was a collaborative proposal between two youth board members, the Executive Director, a Board representative and a local youth centre facilitator. They presented the project to the Board of Directors of United Way of Pictou County as an initiative to expand youth involvement and promote United Way as an outreach organization for all community members, including youth. The Board allocated $10,000 for the three high schools in Pictou County to "fund student activities and committees". This process has been facilitated by the local Youth Centre staff member, Jon Linthorne.

The stated goals of the project were to offer students an opportunity for hands-on experience planning and evaluating a youth focused grant process, to fund student initiatives, to offer youth ownership of the outcomes, and to provide a means of connecting students between three local schools in the area. Dodie Goodwin sees the value in youth-led grants as "bring[ing] new perspectives of the constantly changing environment of the community".

The Youth Centre Facilitator contacted the schools and began coordinating information meetings for students interested in being on a selection committee. With the aid of a school staff advisor, weekly meetings were held and each youth team mapped out their own criteria, application and timeline.

Three tri-school workshops for the selection team members were planned: one in November to outline the skills needed to move forward; the second in February to share actions, processes and decision-making; and the third for May 2009 to conduct evaluations and to develop recommendations for the Board of Directors of United Way.

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[1] The debate revolved around whether younger individuals would be intimidated by applying for funds that were available to young people in their 20's. The age of 23 was a compromise between proponents for a cut-off of 18 years and those advocating a 25-year-old cut-off. The decision was made bearing in mind that individuals in their early 20s may or may not experience their social environment through traditional adult roles and responsibility, and may identify more closely with being a young person. It would be unfair to exclude them.

Continual support and mentorship was offered to each of the school committees by Jon Linthorne. Youth Board Members kept the United Way informed of progress.

Eighteen projects were accepted with $7,000 in funds being distributed in early February 2009. The grant amounts ranged from $100 to $500, with projects led by students aged 13-18. Project themes included art/music, environment, social awareness, and sports/recreation. The projects will all be completed by June 2009. According to United Way's Executive Director in Pictou County, Dodie Goodin 'Good rumours are beginning to circulate [in the community]'.

In gathering information and input for this report, HeartWood attended the February workshop in Stellarton, NS. In attendance were 16 students from the selection committees including two Youth Board Members, Adam and Joel, Dodie Goodwin, the Executive Director of United Way, John Ure, the provincial Child and Youth Specialist of the Northern Region, Jon Linthorne, Youth Centre Facilitator, and various other community members. Interviews were conducted with the Executive Director of United Way and the two Youth Board Members.

3.1.3 YouthScape HRM

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is one of five Canadian sites for a three-year national youth engagement initiative called YouthScape. Funded by the J.W. McConnell Foundation, and managed nationally by the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), YouthScape has worked to develop a youth-led granting program that involves youth who are not usually engaged in mainstream programming, as part of its objectives.

YouthScape is supported locally by the Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection, Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, Nova Scotia Department of Justice, Halifax Public Libraries, United Way of Halifax Region, Youth Employability Project, the Boys and Girls Clubs and many others.

YouthScape HRM's youth-led granting initiative involved youth at all levels of development, including initial visioning, the creation of a youth selection team, youth applications, youth to youth granting and the grant supported youth-led project. YouthScape HRM is in the second year of the three-year initiative and has completed one youth-led granting cycle. As of March 2009, the initiative has begun a second round of granting. The first cycle dispersed approximately $35,000 to 40 youth around HRM, funding a range of projects led by youth ages 12-19. The amount of the grants ranged from $250 to $2500 and supported initiatives around the themes of art/music, peer mentoring, environment, youth knowledge transfer/sharing, and the creation of youth-friendly spaces and activities.

Over seventy thousand dollars is planned for Youthscape HRM's second cycle. The reality and energy of the community will guide the disbursement of funds. The process

will involve workshops to deepen youth engagement and skill development in creative ways. These workshops also promote adult capabilities to genuinely collaborate with youth as partners and decision-makers.

Two youth in Concrete Roots, a hip-hop collective, stated that their experience receiving a youth grant from Youthscape HRM allowed them to take action in their community and follow their passions (Marlee, 14 & Connor, 15). For Bruce, 13, YouthScape HRM funded a project he was passionate about getting involved in, "Rock Club", and gave him somewhere to channel his energy. This provided him and his peers with an example of what can be achieved when you bring your ideas forward.

YouthScape HRM is supported by HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development which acts as the convening organization for the project. YouthScape HRM uses HeartWood's Framework for Community Youth Development as a means to assess youth programs and services which places the core values of *passion, contribute, act, connect and having fun* as central to assessing if youth are engaged. YouthScape HRM has chosen to incorporate this Framework as a guide for the development of its youth-led granting initiative. (See Appendix 2.0- HeartWood's Framework for Community Youth Development)

In gathering information and input for this report, HeartWood conducted interviews with YouthScape staff and grant recipients. Notes from previous focus group meetings, with both selection committee members and 'adult allies', were reviewed. Additionally, YouthScape's year one final report, 'Success Stories and Reflections' and national reports 'Stages of Development' have been integrated into this report.

3.2 National Landscape: Activities in Canada

The growth of youth grant-making initiatives is connected to the efforts to increase youth participation in communities and volunteerism. Across Canada, community foundations are central hubs for promoting, researching and practicing youth-led granting.

The first documented youth-led granting project in Canada was in Vancouver in 1997. In North America it is estimated that there are nearly 500 youth grant-making bodies, with over half running out of community foundations. Guided by their philanthropic mission, community foundations use the idea of Youth in Philanthropy (YiP), placing emphasis on doing an assessment of community needs and addressing them through the grants. The Community Foundation of Nova Scotia noted they are familiar with the practice of youth-led grants, but have not yet undertaken such an initiative. Nationally, United Way has similarly taken a key role in pursuing youth-led granting as a way to engage youth. It appears to take a distinct approach in each community.

The 2004 Community Foundation of Canada report titled 'Unleashing Youth Potential' identified the following factors in creating conditions that are conducive to growth and change for youth engagement: a field of interest relevant to youth; real decision-making

responsibility; supportive adults; room for new ideas, and shifts of power and control (Oates: p.2). Key points from this report are the need for an intentional yet flexible approach to youth engagement. Additionally, the convening organization must think through how it will "provide leadership while developing leadership", "give direction without being directive", and ensure accountability and good practice without maintaining control of the initiative. The report acknowledges that the reality of each community should guide the practice and outcomes. It is not possible, or desirable, to provide one model or template for program development and implementation.

3.3 Research and Activities outside Canada

The terminology of youth-led granting or youth in philanthropy is not uniform or widely used. It is therefore difficult to come across comprehensive international statistics. With a more than 20-year history of youth-led granting, the United States (USA) is a leader in the practice and research of youth in philanthropy. A 2001 report by the Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), commissioned by the James Irvine Foundation, estimates that in 2000 there were 250 youth-led granting initiatives in the USA, distributing between $5 million to $10 million. Entitled 'Changing the Face of Giving', this comprehensive report states that youth-led granting is occurring through foundations, schools, non-profit organizations, government programs and partnerships. Four levels of impact are identified: the youth making grant decisions, the convening organization, the programs and youth that receive the grants, and the communities that benefit from the funded projects. This report identifies some challenges in deepening the impact and reach of youth in philanthropy:

- Lack of diversity in youth participation
- Uncertainties about how to engage youth not traditionally found in leadership roles
- Geographical concentration of activity
- Convincing foundations to challenge the status quo and take the risk of initiating a youth-led granting program
- Balancing the need for flexibility in youth engagement with the rigidity and accountability measures of institutions and organization

The Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth issued a report in 2002 titled 'Best Practices in Youth Philanthropy'. The report identifies that the distinguished features of youth philanthropy, as opposed to other youth development programs, is the level of decision-making granted to youth in grant-making programs. The report identifies five components of a framework for action:

- Build structure and capacity
- Develop youth-adult partnerships
- Create connections
- Develop skills and knowledge
- Plan for sustainability

4.0 Practice: Youth-led Granting in Action

4.1 Approaches

Each of the three different initiatives in Nova Scotia has taken its own approach to setting up a youth-led grant program. The approaches were guided by a variety of factors including source of funding, flexibility and reporting guidelines, program objectives and target population, and timeframe. From these Nova Scotian case studies, three distinct approaches emerged of how to engage youth in philanthropy, while at the same time honoring organizational capacity and accountability

1. Assess interest, remain open and allow for participation to grow organically
   - → Promote widely with some targeted communications
   - → Maintain ongoing communication – become familiar to the youth
   - → Look at what your organization is already doing and branch out from that
   - → As a first step, your organization may need to gain credibility with youth
   - → Keep meetings loosely structured allowing youth to direct next steps

2. Use existing relationships with youth populations or institutions
   - → Use schools as the way to communicate and engage students/youth
   - → Use the established staff-student relationships to have adult allies in the process
   - → Be prepared to abide by institutional guidelines for participation

3. Determine your target population and 'court' them
   - → 'Go where they are' and become familiar through their established networks
   - → Remain accessible and available
   - → Invest time in building relationships without expecting a commitment

While each organization held the objective of youth leadership as central to their initiative, issues of organizational accountability and decision-making parameters remained. The three initiatives communicated to youth the parameters of the project but allowed youth to determine how to move forward within those parameters. The United Way of Pictou County found this approach to be particularly useful. Previous efforts have been hampered by youth's response to rigid criteria. By setting a few parameters like the maximum grant allotment ($500) and timelines, United Way of Pictou County found that youth respected these limits and made consistent and logical decisions as they developed their own criteria. The students also learned about creative problem solving and group decision-making.

Each initiative took distinct approaches to adult involvement. These included matching adult allies with grant recipients, requiring an organizational partner's staff advisors in the school or extending the age of 'young people' to have a wider range of capacities. Adult involvement in any stage of youth-led granting signifies that the adult needs to

become familiar with how to relinquish control and tendencies to 'speak for' youth. YouthScape found the adult 'learnings' to be an important aspect of youth-led granting that required a significant amount of time and energy.

"I am not sure I agree with your radical and risky way of doing things"
-Parent of YouthScape grant recipient unsure about grant going directly to youth

Regarding the distribution of funds, finding a balance between organizational accountability and youth leadership is a difficult task. Adults are often challenged with the task of allowing youth to take the lead *and* responsibility. Feelings of unease or mistrust regarding youth receiving and being responsible for the funds was a common issue for YouthScape. Moreover, the convening organization may be unsure about youth receiving the money directly. The various approaches included having shared responsibility of funds between staff and students, supportive adults to offer direction when needed for youth directly needing funds, or processing the funds through a separate organization to address concerns for accountability.

4.2 Engaging Youth: Gaining their attention *and* their participation

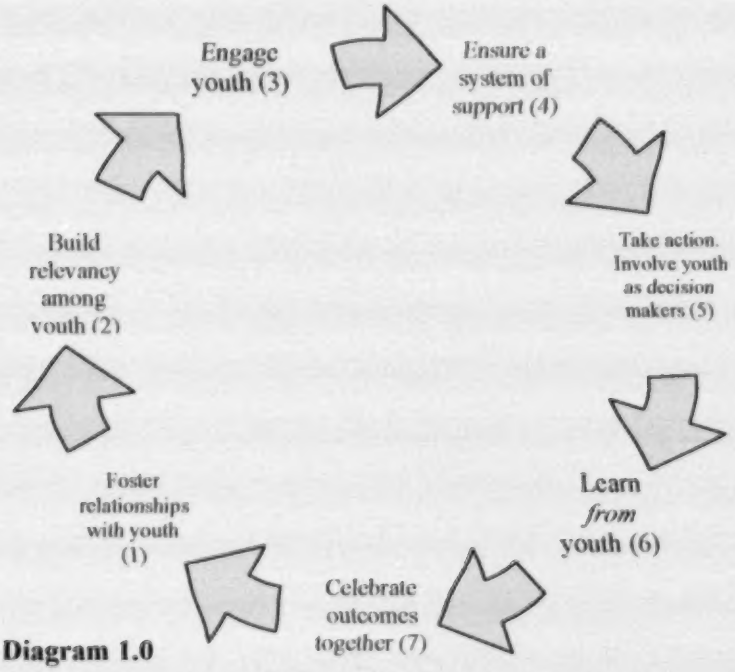

Engage youth (3)
Ensure a system of support (4)
Take action. Involve youth as decision makers (5)
Learn *from* youth (6)
Celebrate outcomes together (7)
Foster relationships with youth (1)
Build relevancy among youth (2)

Diagram 1.0

Youth-led granting involves three stages of youth participation. Using a combination of the above approaches, the first stage is to capture youth's attention *and* interest to create a youth selection team – possibly in collaboration with adults - that determines the criteria and evaluation process for applications.

The second stage is promoting the grants in order to motivate and inspire youth to apply.

The third stage of participation is the 'doing' of the proposed project, which includes obtaining youth participation. Evaluations, reporting and gathering of stories occurs throughout the process, often through collaboration between youth and adults.

Participation is a step-by-step process of facilitation, not simply an invitation. The above diagram offers a cycle of youth-adult partnerships and can act as a basic guide to involving youth in granting. Complimented by the best practices and recommendations, this continual feedback loop portrays the process and outcomes of engaging youth as decision-makers.

4.2.1 Youth Creating, Giving & Doing

> "I have learned how *much* youth are interested and want to be involved, but you have to meet youth where they are and at their interests"
>
> Sabrina Poirier, YouthScape HRM Coordinator

The value of youth-led grants for the convening organization is learning about the nitty-gritty of ***youth engagement*** by making strategic decisions at the first stage of participation, then relinquishing some control of the outcomes and prioritizing the ***value of the process***. This does not signify handing over complete control to the youth but rather offering support, tools, information and encouragement, and allowing them to guide the process. For example the adult coordinator may let the youth know that an application is needed but then allow the youth to guide the design and language. The YouthScape application form was transformed to one of bubbles and colours – clearly communicating to potential youth applicants that this was a program being done not only *for* youth but also *by* youth. As Tyson, 14 of YouthScape HRM commented, "You can always tell the difference between things made *by* youth and things made *for* youth". (See Appendix 3.0-Community-Friendly Language)

The second stage of involvement occurs through the promotion of the grants and the submission of applications. Communicating objectives to the youth selection team in advance, and explaining why these decisions were made, will allow the team to create an informed communication strategy using their informal networks, social networking tools and determination. Conversely, leaving it open allows youth to take their own approach, possibly set their own priorities, and learn from the outcomes. By giving the selection team the opportunity to design the process/forms there is increased ownership of the outcomes. Youth's intimate knowledge of youth issues and networks remains at the forefront of decision-making. Additionally, the adult collaborators or coordinators are positioned as learners, which deepens their ability to do youth engagement work *with* youth not merely *for* youth.

The convergence of youth efforts occurs when the youth selection team receives diverse applications. This is a time for continued adult guidance and youth decision-making. YouthScape found that when youth functioned on their own at this stage, their decisions were made based on the potential of the ideas. Youth

> "I learned we can figure things out without adults *telling us* what we should think"
>
> Larkey, 14, Selection Team Member, YouthScape HRM

not only understand the ideas more quickly but as Sabrina Poirier of YouthScape notes, they know the tension points in their communities and the needs. They have first hand experience of why and how a youth organized hip-hop show will get youth off the street for a night, meeting new people and being exposed to positive momentum in their communities. As Meg, 18 of YouthScape HRM said, "Adults can learn from us". The youth selection teams learn to create contracts, budget forms, and communication plans, while developing problem-solving skills.

One key challenge that youth in Pictou and HRM voiced was not wanting to reject any proposals while still keeping the decision-making process credible. Creative-problem solving avoided leaving a youth feeling rejected without any direction. For example, in Pictou, in lieu of granting nearly $2500 for sorted garbage bins for the school property, the high school industrial arts class took on the construction of the bins with a $500 grant.

The last stage of youth engagement is the 'doing' of the project. By ensuring the youth involved have supportive adults and/or peers throughout the process, the basic hurdles to getting a project done are less daunting. While the logistics of a project may be quite overwhelming, YouthScape found that attending to youth's need for a *system* of support, be it family, schools, community or adult allies was a key to success. It was also deemed important not to assume any or all of these supports were available to the youth.

YouthScape found that understanding a youth's home and school situation helped to shed light on potential barriers to participation. YouthScape has the particular objective of engaging marginalized youth. The value of its work was demonstrated by a doubtful father who had never had the chance to see his 12-year old son as a capable community member. Seeing his son in action, he was transformed into a proud father who now has a fresh perspective on his son's assets and potential.

Moreover, youth-led projects are an opportunity to showcase youth as concerned citizens and active way of communicating their priorities. For example, an environmental clean-up organized by youth brought out 12 community members and was showcased in YouthScape's national report and conference. The experiences in Pictou and HRM have demonstrated that youth take the responsibility of being granted a sum of money very seriously, and when the money is spent, and reports submitted they have learned about budgeting, creative problem solving, persistence and that their contributions are valuable and essential to creating safe and healthy communities.

4.3 Youth as Decision-Makers

Inviting youth to participate in the leadership of an initiative or decision-making process is unfamiliar territory for many people. Traditional structures for decisions and program design are commonly adult-centric and use decision-making processes that are often about accomplishing outcomes rather than evolving with changing circumstances, and including those most impacted by the decisions.

However, many organizations are making the effort to incorporate members of the population they are serving into decision-making processes and structures. Despite this trend, there remains uncertainty about how to include youth into these processes in youth-serving organizations or departments. While the logistics and process of inviting youth to the table may seem unfamiliar, young voices and knowledge will lead to more appropriate decisions and allocation of resources.

HeartWood's Community Youth Development Framework is a solid starting point for identifying the core values of youth engagement. It provides tools for cultivating meaningful growth for youth and organizations (see Appendix 2.0). Engaging youth in decision-making means: challenging terrains of decision-making; relinquishing centralized control; ensuring flexibility and adaptation; and viewing youth as experts on youth.

The outcome is that youth play an active role in shaping youth programming, thus improving organizational relevance to youth. Ideally, partnerships with adults-led organizations would present opportunities for change in our communities.

4.4 Motivations and Interests of Youth

The potential for action on priorities of youth is a unique attribute of youth-led grants. Moreover, the ability to identify barriers to participation is a central lesson of youth-led granting, and for many organizations a point of real growth.

The youth motivations for applying for a grant in the following diagrams attempt to capture why youth are inspired to be a selection team member or apply for grants. The areas of interest are to be understood as central motivators for initiating specific projects.

The specific interests of youth are the primary catalyst for action. Youth wish to link their passions with a community need and are motivated by the potential to showcase their interest, rather than by the need itself. Therefore, outreach to youth must address, and offer an outlet for, their interests and motivations for action. [2]

[2] These motivations were identified from the nature of the projects and grant application forms. This list is supported by the interview content with youth and can be applied to motivations for youth involvement on the selections teams; either their own motivations or aspirations for what the grants to youth can achieve. The percentages are a measure of interests of 38 projects between HRM and Pictou.

Diagram 2.0

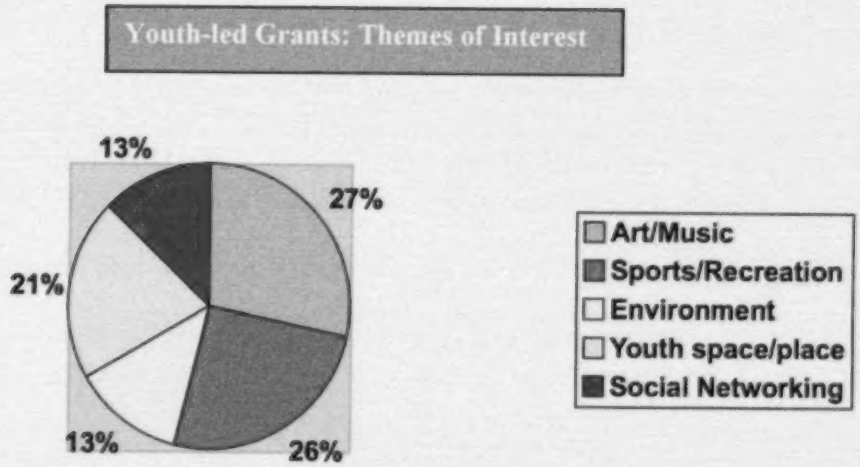
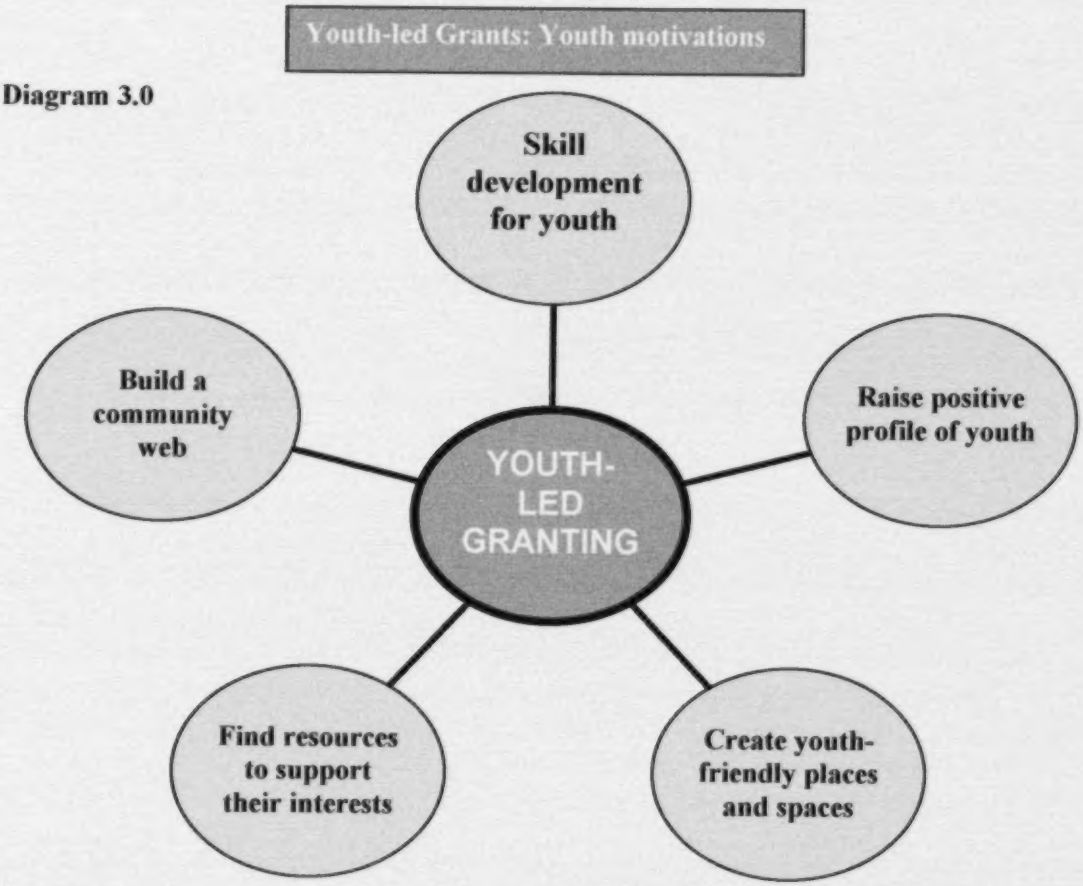


Diagram 3.0


Youth-led Grants: Youth motivations
Skill development for youth
Build a community web
Raise positive profile of youth
YOUTH-LED GRANTING
Find resources to support their interests
Create youth-friendly places and spaces

4.5 Tools and Strategies: Some Basics

Some basic, but often overlooked, tools and strategies are useful to organizations that administer youth-led grants:

- Have free and fun events/activities in lieu of info booths to inform youth of opportunities
- Use social networking tools, email, e-vites and texting to connect with youth involved on an on-going basis.
- Meet together and play together – bring video games (Guitar Hero, Dance Dance Revolution), art, music, etc. and be prepared to be playful and look 'silly' before being seen as a credible adult support person.
- Put youth in a helping role. (e.g. "We are really lost on this, and could use your help to figure it out.")
- Build on where your organization is already connected and then branch out.
- Use youth-led granting as a platform for deepening youth engagement by inviting youth to participate on committees or as youth board members.
- Have food and time to socialize.
- Incorporate fun and creative ways of doing group work, presenting projects (mini-commercials, tableaus, etc.) and communicating challenges and suggestions.
- Allow youth to bring friends, siblings or girl/boyfriends. This can expand involvement and expresses a youth-friendly approach.
- Offer transportation support – either bus tickets, carpooling or taxi chits.

5.0 Impacts and Benefits of Youth-led Granting

5.1 Impacts

The impacts of youth-led granting can be seen as a continuum of impacts, where benefits are nested in the depth of the youth engagement practice. By including youth throughout the granting cycle, youth-led granting allows for the reality of youth to guide the granting process.

The impacts of youth-led granting in Nova Scotia can be seen at four different levels of involvement:

- Youth grant-makers
- Facilitating organizations
- Youth grant recipients
- Broader community

The main impacts identified through this review of youth-led granting experiences in Nova Scotia are the following:

> "[It] breaks down the stereotype that youth are a poison to the community"
>
> **Adam, 18**
> **Selection Committee Member, United Way of Pictou County**

- → Youth are seen as legitimate and valuable decision-makers and have an outlet for meaningful contribution
- → Youth-led grants brings a different perspective to community priorities and showcases youth as active community members
- → Youth-adult partnership is experienced as mutually beneficial
- → Civic engagement of youth contributes to their professional and educational development
- → Highlights positive contributions of youth in the community and counters negative stereotypes
- → Links youth passions with an outlet for action
- → Empowers youth leadership and promotes civic engagement in communities
- → Strengthens connections between youth and community
- → Encourages communities to 'think outside the box' and engage youth in new and valuable ways
- → Expresses trust and belief in the potential of youth and their ideas

5.2 Benefits

5.2.1 Youth Grant-Makers

> **Jamie, 21 a grant recipient of YouthScape HRM,** sees the importance of peer support in getting youth engaged. With youth-led granting, he says peer-support is built in. *"The other youth relate to you; peer support is automatic"*

While the convening organization guides much of the foundational work required to initiate youth-led granting, the youth who participate as a member of a selection or grants team shape the tone and spirit of the initiative.

In Nova Scotia youth members of the selection or grant team have established criteria for grant applications, promoted the grant funding, assessed and awarded grants and provided support to recipients through to the completed stage of the funded projects. Youth are keen and capable to take the lead and act collaboratively.

The benefits seen among youth grant-makers include:

- → Becoming familiar with group decision-making processes and dealing with a diversity of opinions
- → Developing creative problem solving skills
- → Gaining experience as decision-makers and understanding the difficulty of this task
- → Acting on the potential of projects rather than being hindered by the risks
- → Building confidence and competencies among youth through leadership roles
- → Gaining experience with financial responsibility and accountability
- → Seeing and demonstrating how a little bit of money *and trust* can go a long way
- → Learning the value and reward of seeing an initiative from start to finish

5.2.2 Facilitating Organizations

Youth-led granting is an exercise of trust. For United Way of Halifax Region and Pictou County, the allocation of funds to youth-led granting required promotion of its merit as a way to deepen United Way's relevance to youth and their commitment to youth as an organization. The initiative required consideration of the *whole process*, including tangible and intangible outcomes, for the funding organization and youth.

YouthScape has a solid foundation for promoting youth-centered and strength-based learning, as well as engaging youth through youth-led granting.[3] Funded by the McConnell Foundation and local partners, YouthScape's experience with youth-led granting has similarly involved a steep and invigorating learning curve around relationship building, flexibility and meaningful participation of youth.

The benefits seen among facilitating organizations include:

- → Learning to view the potential and ideas of youth as valuable in and of themselves
- → Seeing that granting a small amount of money to youth can make a big difference
- → Identifying some of the key barriers to youth engagement
- → Challenging organizational culture to improve practices of inclusion
- → Gaining relevance and credibility among youth
- → Being at the forefront of communicating positive messages, and outlets for action, about and for youth

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[3] Strength-based learning, or an appreciative approach, is an aspect of HeartWood's Community Youth Development Framework. Strength-based learning focuses attention on strengths, potential, and possibilities. The focus is on the results that are desired rather than on what does not work or reasons 'why not'. Strength-based learning focuses on what is already working and creating possibilities and opportunities to naturally move towards one's desired goal.

5.2.3 Youth Grant Recipients

Youth that are awarded grants through the youth-led granting initiatives incur many benefits beyond the actual funding which comes their way. Youth who apply for grants must formulate their ideas, process the value and contribution of their initiative, and submit the idea with a budget or cost estimate to the selection committee. Youth are asked to work within a certain timeframe, to maintain open communication and to be responsible for the allotted funds and the final outcome. As one youth board member of the United Way in Pictou astutely notes, "Those who did the grant applications showed a lot of initiative, and I suppose bravery, putting their idea out there and having it judged by their peers." (Adam, 18)

The benefits identified among youth grant recipients include:

- → Providing a voice for youth priorities and communicating their ideas and potential
- → Portraying a positive image of youth to the wider community
- → Gaining experience with leadership and decision-making
- → Developing organizational and communication skills
- → Developing experience with financial responsibility and accountability
- → Building social networks and understanding of community organizations
- → Strengthening confidence and competencies for future academic and professional endeavors
- → Demonstrating the value and potential of adult-youth collaboration
- → Providing a medium for demonstrating to their social supports/families their passions and capabilities
- → Acting as a model of leadership and initiative to their peers

Tyson, 14, a grant recipient of YouthScape HRM, learned a lot about leadership and decision-making. At first, he acted "like an adult" and told everyone what to do, but then he saw the value of sharing decision-making and connecting with other resources and leaders.

5.2.4 Broader Communities

All three initiatives identified that the funded project should be led by youth or be youth-centered. This allowed for a lot of potential in the outcomes, and ended up identifying areas of interest and concern among youth that may not have been otherwise known. As a result, wider communities are exposed to positive contributions from youth, which is something that those interviewed for this report see as a priority in their communities. Youth-led grants address a common concern that "if people don't find a way to be engaged in a positive way, they'll find it in a negative way" (Camille Dumond, YouthScape HRM Evaluator).

Informed by the conversations with youth and youth facilitators, the benefits identified for the broader communities include:

- → Cultivating positive associations of youth as members of the community
- → Learning about the priorities and needs of youth through the youth-led initiatives
- → Positive youth-led activities for the community such as, environmental clean up, opportunity for involvement, youth empowerment, promoting active youth, donations/fundraising events for community needs etc.
- → Promoting respectful collaboration and partnerships between youth and adults
- → Highlighting youth's passions and competencies to their social networks and breaking down potential barriers of communication
- → Invigorating civic engagement and social responsibility
- → Identifying barriers to youth engagement and areas for development

The above listed benefits of youth-led granting include the benefits *to* and *of* the involvement of the four groups. While the three initiatives in Nova Scotia are relatively new to youth-led granting, their presence and commitment to youth engagement lays the foundation for future initiatives. Trust, belief and excitement about the merit and potential of youth-led granting build on the benefits of previous experiences and grow from the challenges.

6.0 Key Lessons: Building on Strengths and Growing through Challenges

The learning curve for both the youth and facilitating organizations can be steep. While some challenges, such as communication, scheduling and flexibility, may have been foreseen, others, such as transportation and the extensive foundational work required for youth *and* parent/caregiver 'buy-in,' were not anticipated as central to the outcomes of the initiatives. The benefits of having youth as decision-makers and leaders include a passion for change among youth, thirst for knowledge and the creativity of new ideas.

The following list outlines some of the strengths of youth and the challenges faced by the three organizations in their efforts to engage youth in granting.

6.1 Strengths:

- **Youth are passionate about their social and community environment**
  - → Youth want to be involved in changes that are relevant to how they experience and understand their communities. As with most individuals who do not volunteer, many youth have remained unengaged because "they were never asked to participate".
  - → Youth are the experts on youth and consequently know how to break down the barriers to youth engagement more quickly than adults. They know the tension points and have an organic ability to use a strength-based approach.

- **Youth are eager to learn and genuinely explore new ideas**

- → Most young people are active knowledge seekers but their learning needs to be on their own terms and built on their interests.
- → Organizations need to be able to link youth passions with something in the community and leverage them for further involvement.
- → Youth are willing to delve into tough issues and ask the big picture 'why' questions about issues like diversity, decision-making processes etc. which makes for more informed decision-making.

- **Youth see the potential of ideas**
  - → Youth are energized by the potential of new ideas rather than hindered by the perceived risks. They take their tasks seriously, while allowing potential to guide decisions rather than fear.
  - → Youth have the firsthand experience of how and why something will work.

6.2 Challenges:

- **The value and difficulty of having a diversity of youth involved**
  - → Engaging a diversity of youth in the granting cycle involves targeted communications and the possibility of rejection if the approach is not in tune with the needs of specific communities. Background research and foundational work is required.
  - → Avoiding tokenism, engaging a broad spectrum of youth and facilitating meaningful contribution enriches the experience for youth and adults alike. Time for discussion to build common understanding accounts for diversity of opinions and experiences.
  - → An absence of varied representation of youth can limit the ability to address the diversity of youth needs based on age, race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, family stability and abilities.

- **The issue of transportation**
  - → The geographical dispersion of both HRM and Pictou means that transportation to and from events that are not part of everyday routine may unknowingly exclude certain youth.
  - → Bus tickets/taxi chits/mileage/insurance should be included in the program budget and as part of the program to minimize stigmatizing certain youth.
  - → Organizations need to adapt to work with a population where lack of mobility is a central barrier to engagement.

- **Relationship and trust building with youth takes a substantial amount of time**
  - → Include a realistic amount of time for communicating with youth and becoming a familiar face.
  - → Organizations need to establish themselves as credible and relevant to the priorities of youth, offering an opportunity is often not sufficient.

- → Make the effort to 'go where youth are' and offer fun, commitment free ways to check out the opportunity with your organization.

- **Family/home life can either enable or hinder youth engagement**
  - → Include a realistic amount of time for communicating with parents/caregivers and addressing their questions and concerns.
  - → Be prepared to build relationships with parents/caregivers and confirm why "this is a good thing."
  - → Becoming familiar with youth's home environment offers insight into the barriers of youth engagement. Keep lines of communication open.
  - → A lack of social supports can be a main barrier for participation for youth. It is important to either build social support into the program or cultivate involvement of established supports.
  - → Sustainable and meaningful youth engagement requires a whole system of support including families, teachers and caregivers and community organizations. Do not assume youth feel connected to all or any of these.
  - → Many parents/caregivers are unaware of what youth are involved in and may need encouragement to trust their competencies.

- **Adaptable organizations and flexible timelines are essential**
  - → Improving the flexibility of reporting timelines and formats allows for a more genuine and complete expression of benefits and outcomes from youth.
  - → Highly-structured templates limits completion rates and dissuades youth from expressing the true impact of their project due to lack of room for creativity.
  - → Rigid organizational guidelines and structures can be an impediment to engaging youth in the organization.
  - → Youth are constantly being evaluated. Presenting the report as an opportunity for expression rather than a requirement for recognition will improve completion rates.

- **Many of the skills and processes are new to youth**
  - → The learning curves for youth require attention, time and encouragement.
  - → Remaining open to new approaches and trial and error is central to meaningful collaboration with youth.

- **Issues around liability and accountability**
  - → Organizations may need to adjust insurance when integrating youth into programming and leadership. Anticipating additional administration hours and costs for such items will make for a more accurate budget.
  - → Organizational protocol for fund distribution may restrict abilities to distribute funds directly to youth. Creative problem solving and encouraging flexibility will be required.
  - → Offering information to youth on ethics and fiscal accountability prior to distributing funds can aid in minimizing issues later on.
  - → Youth may require support in learning how to stretch their money by asking for discounts, donated space or items.

6.3 A Funding Caveat – Foundation, NGOs & Government

One caveat of facilitating a youth-led grant program that surfaced throughout this research was the need for flexibility and adaptability. Each organization faced their unique hurdles in maintaining accountability to funders and working with reporting and timelines, and addressing terrains of decision-making. However, youth-led granting with flexibility offers a unique opportunity for learning about the process and actual time required to meaningfully involve youth in decision-making and leadership roles. The decision to do so must also come with openness to feedback and suggestions, and a consideration that adaptation is an inevitable part of genuine promotion of youth engagement.

The following offers an overview of the strengths and challenges to various sources of funding including Foundations, Community Organizations, and Government.

Foundations

Funding through foundations offered the most flexibility in program development, reporting and youth leadership. While structure and timeframes required adaptation and revision as YouthScape programming developed, Sabrina Poirier noted that the success of the first year was possible only because of the McConnell Family Foundation's willingness to genuinely receive feedback and adapt accordingly.

Foundations clearly function with distinct levels of autonomy and decision-making structures that allows for such adaptability, with the level of flexibility being dependent on the foundation. YouthScape found that the reporting guidelines also offered space to maintain a youth-centered focus. Reports were written in youth-friendly ways that could be slightly adapted for other funders. Program Coordinator, Sabrina Poirier, found that many of the local funders found this reporting style to be comprehensive, enjoyable and to sufficiently meet their requirements, while being accessible to youth. Additionally, foundations are often able to commit to funding a project for multiple years and have a sustainability component built in through the requirement of matching community funds. While foundations have their own unique challenges and are often located outside the given community, the above outlined areas of flexibility greatly contributed to YouthScape success in the HRM.

Community Organizations

Fiscal accountability to the community and its funders is a central priority of the Board of Directors of community organizations. It comes therefore as no surprise that it would take some time for the Board to warm to the idea of allotting a sum of money to an independent group who then decide how it is distributed. That said, both the United Way of Halifax Region and of Pictou County found ways to do this with confidence in the initiative. The United Way of Halifax Region received a one-time donation of which $5

000 was earmarked for youth-led granting, and thus offered a low-risk opportunity for starting the 'Youth Grants Team.' The Pictou County United Way committed $10 000 to the initiative with the guarantee that all monies not used would be returned and basic reporting parameters put in place.

Fitting youth-led granting into existing processes at United Way was an initial challenge in Halifax. It is clear that the organization is genuinely interested in this approach to youth engagement. However, as part of this commitment the governing body must further push established parameters of decision-making and internal processes.

United Way's regulations on funding, which restrict grants to registered charities, created challenges for extending youth-led grants to youth who are not connected to school or community programs. These types of parameters invariably shape the reach of creative approaches to youth engagement.

By committing to, and trusting, youth-led granting, United Way has connected youth with the organization. In the process United Way has gained a unique level of credibility among youth. Both Pictou County and Halifax United Way see this as a key success.

Government

Government support of community-led initiatives is central to bridging community practice with policy development. Guidelines for government funding commonly require concise reports and templates that measure outcomes and expenditures and can limit discussion of process. With youth-led granting, the process is a central outcome of the initiative and comes with textured and personal stories for each youth involved.

Flexibility in timelines and reporting formats is an important caveat of youth-led granting. By allowing for simplified and narrative reports, the process of developing a youth-led grant initiative can be integrated into the report and lend to a more comprehensive picture of the outcomes.

While government may face limitations in their flexibility, it can play a key role in advocating for, promoting and showcasing progressive strategies for youth community development. Modeling youth engagement within government promotes youth participation as inherent to youth development. Furthermore, public recognition by government of the value of certain initiatives and approaches can act as leverage for additional funding for youth serving organizations.

7.0 Moving Forward: Best Practices & Recommendations

7.1 Best Practices

Informed by the experiences, insights and input of youth and adult supporters involved in youth-led granting, the following list of Best Practices offers an action-oriented list of practices that have been useful guideposts in creating meaningful youth-led grant initiatives. Each of the seven (7) Best Practices is followed by a list of guiding principles to offer direction for the actual practice of youth-led granting.

1. Build an understanding of youth in your community

- → Become familiar with the diversity of youth and youth experiences in your community. Assume all populations are possible participants for your initiative.
- → Decide which groups of youth you want to engage and *go where they are.*
- → Allot time to building relationships and trust with youth. Be patient and accessible.
- → Allow for the involvement of youth to evolve from the participation of other youth. Word of mouth, informal networks, social networking technology, peer recruitment and the building of credibility for your organization are all part of the process of gaining 'buy-in' from youth.
- → Use popular youth communication tools/locations such as email, facebook, youth centres/groups, schools, etc. as much as possible. Being accessible to youth through familiar locations or communication tools gives them autonomy to choose to be involved and also makes it easy for them to do so.
- → If the given population is not responding either change your approach or change the criteria for participation. Be prepared to learn as you go and allow for the process to be emergent and evolve organically. Be honest about the limitations of your organization.

2. Be flexible and adaptable

- → Be flexible and adaptable as youth lead the development and design of the initiative.

> *"I was surprised at the youths' willingness to really delve into tough issues about diversity and question why this was important. It is something you rarely see among adult committees."*
>
> Caitlin Power Hancey, United Way of Halifax Region

- → Allow for creative meeting formats and avoid rigidly structured agendas.
- → Be prepared to include substantial time for socializing and food when scheduling a meeting. Discussion of seemingly 'unrelated' items allows for building common understandings between youth and among youth and adults. This will deepen the experience for all and make for better communication and decision-

making throughout the process.

→ Be clear with youth about the parameters of the program and their responsibilities (funding, region, age range) and explain why. Then allow and expect youth to creatively design the initiative using their tools, strengths and priorities.

→ Resist formalizing youth involvement too soon and allow for different levels of time commitment and responsibilities.

→ Offer opportunities for ideas to get brewing and then be sure to offer an outlet for *action.*

3. Build genuine youth-adult partnerships

→ Be prepared to challenge organizational processes and terrains of decision-making among adults involved.

→ Encourage and communicate the importance of adults relinquishing control of established guidelines and decision-making procedures to allow for youth contributions and leadership to flourish.

> *The YouthScape grants are a chance to "earn respect from their parents"... show their parents they can do it... then their parents give them more respect."*
>
> AJ, 14,
> Selection TeamMember,
> YouthScape HRM

→ Be sure to address and clarify youth specific needs/priorities such as transportation, food and time for fun. Include these in the proposed budget.

→ Openness to youth autonomy, leadership and ownership are central to creating a meaningful and valuable experience for the youth, convening organization *and* community.

→ Be prepared to communicate with parents/caregivers about what the youth is involved in. This initiative may act as a parent/caregiver's introduction to the youth's capabilities and competencies.

→ Be prepared for continual learning, growth and adaptation.

4. Build on the potential

→ Remain open to the potential of the ideas rather than hindered by the perceived risks.

> *"YouthScape takes on the financial risk and then proves the potential of youth and their ideas to others. This provides youth with a voice and changes how people see them."*
>
> Sabrina Poirier, Coordinator
> YouthScape HRM

→ Experience has shown that giving small amounts of money to a youth renders wide reaching returns. By including youth in all stages of granting from "creating, giving, and doing," the amount granted to one individual yields much value beyond the grant recipient.

→ Granting small amounts of money to youth not only offers youth credibility in their community and family, but also offers your

organization legitimacy among the youth population. Both can then use this experience as leverage for additional funding and/or to engage different populations of youth.

→ Youth-friendly applications and reporting formats will significantly increase response rates and responsible follow up.

→ Be prepared to address hesitation around perceived risks among adult decision-makers and challenge fear based decision-making.

→ Do research. There are many examples of the benefits and value of youth-led granting across Canada. Use local and national examples to demonstrate the precedent and rate of return in youth-led granting.

5. Encourage creativity

→ Create simple and flexible applications and reporting formats.

→ Encourage creative applications and reporting such as podcasts, mp3 files, photo essays and/or narrative reports will not only make for more interesting reports and will offer a much richer story of the project outcomes and impacts.

> *YouthScape grants teach the youth that they can have their own ideas and they don't have to follow others.*
>
> Meg, 18, YouthScape HRM, Selection Team Member

→ Creative and flexible approaches are more welcoming to youth and significantly increase response and completion rates.

→ Take into account literacy rates, 'youth-speak', language and math skills. Use simple language, avoid jargon, and offer examples and basic information requirements.

→ Remember, youth-friendly invariably means readable and simple and in turn, adult-friendly. The reverse however, is often not the case.

6. Promote meaningful inclusion and contributions

→ Integrate youth throughout the whole process as much as possible, and avoid tokenism.

→ Invite youth to participate in meetings and/or events that are relevant to their skills. This is when their participation will be most valuable and meaningful to the youth and the larger group. Be intentional with invitations and avoid inviting all youth to everything in an effort to be inclusive.

→ Invite youth participation in all stages of development only if the meetings are youth friendly and relevant to the youth. Be clear about why you want the youth involved and if possible be specific, but not rigid, of their role/contribution at the meeting/event.

> *I learned so much, how to work with people you don't agree with.*
>
> Jen, 18, YouthScape HRM, Selection Team Member

→ Be familiar with what motivates youth to be involved and create opportunities for their goals to be realized (e.g. meeting new people, advancing job/school opportunities).

→ Value the time of youth.
→ Be clear about decision-making processes (consensus, majority etc.) and ensure if youth are present that they will be involved and/or contribute to the decision-making process. Be open to trying new approaches to lighten up the meeting.

7. Plan for sustainability

→ Gather narratives, stories and challenges throughout the initiative. Gathering this information will be useful for evaluative reports and future proposals. Including the voice of youth in these documents will help make the materials relevant to youth.
→ Create evaluation tools that are built into the process. During meetings take time to reflect on the successes and challenges in fun and playful ways.
→ Remember that it takes time for programs to become relevant and credible among youth. In order to achieve the desired impact, the initiative may require a period of sustainable growth. As much as possible seek a commitment of multi-year funding from your organization.
→ Build upon the experience as decision-makers to invite youth to participate in other initiatives. This may be a good opportunity to have youth sit on a committee or board to improve an organization's youth engagement objectives.

7.2 Extending the value of youth-led grants: Recommendations for moving forward

Informed by the findings of this report, the following shortlist of recommendations is offered to provide guidance on how to expand and deepen the value and contribution of youth-led granting as a form of youth engagement in Nova Scotia.

7.2.1 Recommendations for moving forward

- **Promote youth-led granting as a valuable *form* of youth engagement**
  → Help develop youth-led grants as a recognized mechanism for engaging youth.
  → Promote youth-led initiatives and youth as decision makers as valued approaches to youth development.

- **Showcase the youth-led grants as a *portrayal* of positive civic engagement**
  → Portray both grant-makers and recipients as embodiments of the positive impact youth *are* having on communities.
  → Ensure that messaging is youth-centric and positions youth as capable and responsible decision makers.

- **Create a provincially funded youth-friendly guide for youth-led granting**

→ Build upon existing experience in the community to compile a guide to disseminate best practices and promote youth-led granting.
→ Prioritize youth engagement principles and an accessible format that builds on the 2005 Youth Engagement Strategy by HRM.

- **Create a youth engagement assessment tool specific to youth-led granting**
  → Develop a tool for assessing an organization or community's readiness for incorporating youth into leadership and decision-making.
  → Offer this tool as a complimentary, but independent, document to the youth-led granting guide and HRM's Youth Engagement Strategy and resource kit. Use the 'Youth Inclusion Assessment Tool' created by HeartWood and the Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat as a starting point.

- **Create a youth-led grant fund**
  → Help reduce barriers to initiating youth-led granting by offering seed-money for organizations.
  → Build in a sustainability measure and either ensure multi-year funding or facilitate funding partnerships.

- **Consult with youth**
  → Utilize a youth centered community agency to consult with youth about how they would like to be involved and their opinions incorporated into government models.
  → Move towards youth advisory committees and youth leadership roles within government departments whose mandate is to serve youth.
  → Build in mechanisms that allow for consultation with youth on grants related to youth.
  → Collaborate with youth development agencies to facilitate this process and utilize the strong social and organizational capital available in the province.

- **Build community capacity**
  → Partner with youth development agencies to offer professional development workshops on youth engagement and youth-led granting.
  → Include youth development as central to community development initiatives and offer direction on where to find appropriate training and resources.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

Youth engagement is an increasingly important component of community development and planning. While many advances have been made, youth engagement is particularly challenging given the rate of change within the social and youth landscape in communities. Therefore, communities, government and youth-serving organizations must continually assess the outcomes of their efforts and search for new approaches that deepen their youth engagement work. Youth-led granting appears to be an approach that is flexible enough to allow for adaptations, but adventurous enough to capture the attention, and participation, of youth with a broad spectrum of experiences and backgrounds.

The initial surprise that "[Adults] are giving us money!" (Youth in Pictou County) immediately communicates to youth that this is something different and worth investigating. Offering youth ownership of a process that has traditionally been reserved for adults, such as distribution of funds, has the effect of affirming a belief in the potential of youth and recognizes their unique insights into the needs of their peers. Based on the research findings of this report, youth-led granting holds much potential for a genuine incorporation of youth into communities as valued community members.

> *"Youth know what they want positively. What benefits youth in a positive way and what would make a difference."*
>
> Joel,17,
> Selection Team Member,
> United Way of Pictou County

As stated in the introductory section, the purpose of this report is to examine youth-led granting activities in Nova Scotia. United Way of Halifax Region and of Pictou County, along with YouthScape HRM are presented as three main case studies in Nova Scotia.

Youth engagement through granting has also occurred in Nova Scotia through other initiatives such as the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative (2001-2004), SOGO (current) and HRM Youth (ongoing) and there are likely activities occurring that have yet to been identified. This report represents three initiatives that demonstrate a particular quality of youth engagement as per the definition offered. The positive successes and outcomes of the case studies thus far prove the value of youth-led granting as an approach to youth engagement.

A key lesson from this research is that identifying youth motivations for participation and using their interests to meet their aspirations is immensely important in youth-led granting. Youth expressed desires to develop skills, build community networks, promote a positive youth profile, create youth-friendly spaces/places and find resources to develop their interests. Youth-led grants clearly prove the willingness of youth to be involved. Understanding key barriers to participation such as transportation, family dynamics, communication and relevancy allows organizations to see traditionally marginalized youth as potential participants if certain issues are addressed.

Youth are experts on youth. While the logistics and processes of including youth as decision-makers may be unfamiliar to many, their voice and knowledge will lead to more appropriate decisions and allocations of resources. Engaging youth as decision-makers requires pushing boundaries and comfort levels; it requires time and patience.
The best practices and recommendations are offered as a guide for developing and deepening the practice of youth-led granting in Nova Scotia.

Appendix 1.0 – Guiding Interview Questions

The following interview questions acted as a guide for interviews and discussions with those involved with youth-led grants.

Youth

Youth Selection Team member –

PROCESS

1. What inspired you to get involved in youth-led granting?
2. What was your process as a team?
3. How did you make decisions as a team?
4. What worked well?
5. What did not work well?
6. What were your greatest sources of support during this process?
7. What support did/are you offering to the youth grant recipients

PRACTICE

8. Did you learn any skills or new knowledge from this experience? (about youth, collaboration, processes, approaches, decision making…?)
9. How do you see this experience being useful for yourself either personally or professionally in the future?
10. In your mind what was that most valuable outcome of this experience?
11. What does a project like this communicate to you about the role and value of youth in your community?
12. What surprised you in this experience?
13. Were there any challenges? (as a group or as an individual)
14. If you were to do this again, what would you do differently?

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. What tips would you offer other youth grant recipients or youth selection committees?
16. In your mind what are the pros of youth led granting to youth? (As opposed to an adult selection committee?)
17. What impact did these grants have on your community?
18. What did you learn about yourself, your team and community?

Youth Grant Recipients

PROCESS

1. What was your project idea?
2. What inspired you to apply for a youth grant and inspired your specific project?
3. What worked well?
4. What did not work well?
5. What were your greatest sources of support during this process?
6. What support has been offered by the selection committee?

PRACTICE

7. What did you learn from this experience (skills, knowledge, other)
8. In your mind what was that most valuable outcome of this experience?
9. Has this experience affected how you make decisions and your leadership abilities? How so?
10. What does a project like this communicate to you about the role and value of youth in your community?
11. What surprised you in this experience?
12. Were there any challenges? (as a group or as an individual)
13. If you were to do this again, what would you do differently?

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. What tips would you offer another youth-led grant group?
15. In your mind what are the pros of youth led granting to youth? (As opposed to an adult selection committee?)
16. What impact did your project have on your community?
17. What did you learn about yourself, your team and community?

Organizations/Staff

PROCESS

1. What process did you use to set up a youth-led granting initiative (ie. outreach for a youth selection committee, support for the committee, selection of grant recipients)?
2. What support did you offer the selection committee and the recipients?
3. What worked well?
4. What didn't work well?

PRACTICE

5. In your view what are the pros of youth led granting to youth? (as opposed to an adult led selection committee)
6. Can you describe the different outcomes you have seen or expect with youth making decisions about grants rather than adults
7. What were the main obstacles in your efforts to get a youth led granting program up and running?
8. Were there any surprises from your experience?
9. What were the challenges that you experienced?
10. Can you describe any benefits to your organization that you anticipate/have seen from this initiative?
11. What did you learn about yourself, your organization and your community? (Has this experience impacted how you understand issues related to youth in your community?)
12. What population of youth do you want to reach through this initiative? How was this done and were there any lessons learned in your outreach process?
13. In your view what is the most valuable outcome of youth led granting?

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. If you could do it again, what might you do differently?
15. What tips would you offer to another host organization?

Appendix 2.0 – HeartWood's Community Youth Development Framework

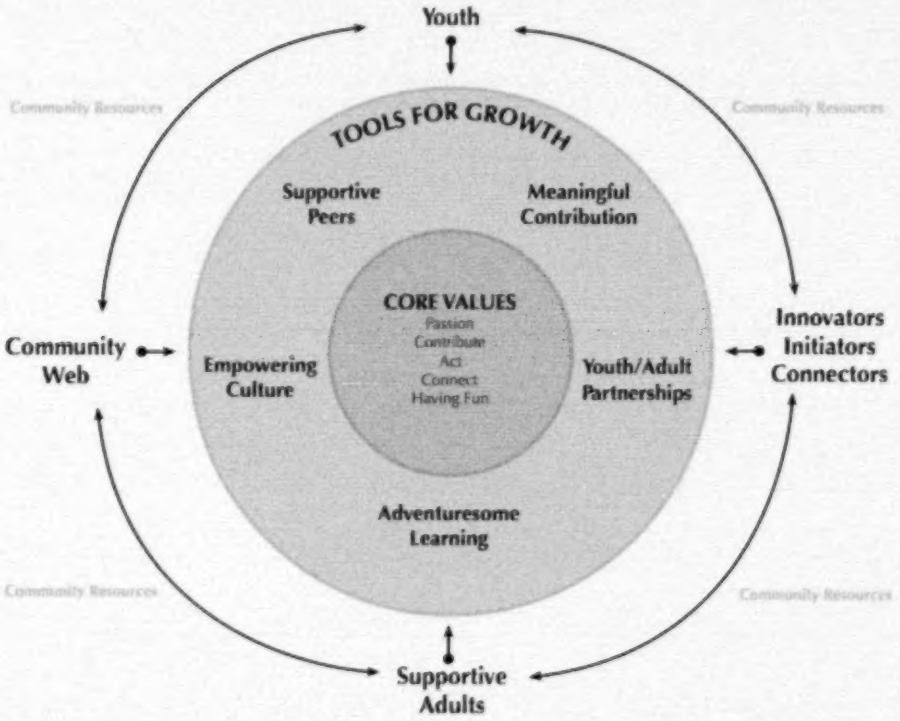
HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development
A Framework for Community Youth Development

With over 18 years experience in youth engagement, and having discovered the varying levels and types of support community groups and individuals may require with their own youth engagement efforts, HeartWood has developed a *Community Youth Development Framework*. Community Youth Development (CYD) is the process of young people being engaged in meaningful participation through planning, decision-making, and program delivery in governments, organizations, institutions, and communities. While encouraging the gifts and talents of individual young people, CYD places equal focus on the investment of these assets in the community.

The Framework blends practices of youth development and community development in a deliberate effort to generate both individual and community outcomes. The framework guides HeartWood's practice with a goal of meaningful youth involvement in organizations, institutions, agencies, and communities.

The foundation of the Framework is based on HeartWood's work with youth and communities in Nova Scotia, Canada. Redefined and strengthened through research, it now reflects the voices of both youth and adults working together in youth action teams in which partnerships are based on mutual learning, teaching, and action. Using the appreciative inquiry approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 54 participants from 12 youth action teams across Nova Scotia. An equal number of male and female youth, mainly from rural areas, were interviewed. Participants included 28 young people, 17 adult support people, and nine community agency representatives who have supported or received service from a team.

In the Framework diagram the inner circle describes the *Core Values* young people have identified that encourage their engagement, these core values have proven to be helpful touchstones by which to assess youth programs and services. For more information on the Core Values and how they were determined. See the 2006 article by A. Warner et al <http://www.heartwood.ns.ca/resources_publications.shtml>.



The middle circle *Tools for Growth,* describes those tools HeartWood has found to be effective in bringing about the *core values* in practice. Like any tool, there are a number of different ways in which to apply them depending on the job at hand, the available material, and skill level and experience of those handling these tools. HeartWood is constantly exploring in many diverse contexts various means to apply these tools.
Tools for Growth

- Meaningful Contribution: Taking action to meet a genuine need.
- Adventuresome Learning: Engaging, real life experiences that challenge individuals to step outside of their comfort zones to learn and grow.
- Supportive Peers: Creating the atmosphere that fosters a strong peer team where individuals feel connected, appreciated and supported by others.
- Youth-Adult Partnerships: Gaining inspiration, support and guidance through a relationship of mutual caring and respect.

- Empowering Culture: Providing opportunities for youth to initiate, commit, plan and choose paths to work together with peers and the community as active citizens.

The outer circle – *Community Resources* – concerns the organizing of a systems wide approach to foster youth engagement. The *systems* may be an organization, institution, government agency, or community.

- Initiator, Innovator, Connector: can be an individual, a group of people (youth and/or adults), or an organization that has a specific interest or motivation and is a bright light or energy source to see increased youth engagement in the defined system.

- Youth: meaningful roles for youth participation in the system.

- Supportive Adults: meaningful roles for supportive adults to help young people navigate the system.

- Community Web: a linking of other youth serving and/or community based organizations, government agencies and individuals who can play a role towards increased youth engagement in the system.

Currently, through funding from the Rural Secretariat Models Program, The *Youth Engagement in Rural Community* (YERC) research project will help HeartWood develop a model based on this Framework. The three sites which are testing the model are: Nain, NL, Mt Stewart, PEI, and Eastern Townships, QC.
http://www.heartwood.ns.ca/yerc.shtml

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Appendix 3.0- Community Friendly Language

YouthScape
community based. youth paced.

Community-friendly Language

Using clear and concise language is vital to keeping individuals of **any age** engaged in meetings and events. Diversity in ages and backgrounds can mean a diversity of terms and definitions. It is important to look at everything from the perspective of someone new and how they may read it. Our goal is to ensure they understand what they are reading and hearing.

YouthScape HRM has sought out and received feedback from community members to make our writing a little more community-friendly. They have taught us to use fewer words, a more conversational tone and terms that are clear or can be explained in a line or two. This works well for adults as well as youth, and can create a more safe and supportive environment for everyone to participate in the discussions and decisions being made.

Before proceeding with a document, ask yourself a few questions...

1 - If I were new to this group, would I understand this document? If not, what needs to be clarified?

2 - Could I have said the same thing with fewer words or would it lose the message if I did?

3 - Is the document laid out in a way that is easy on the eyes? Is there space between bullets and paragraphs? Are the headings bolded or italicized? Are there graphics to help emphasize the message visually?

Using a more community-friendly approach to language may take a little longer initially, but the long-term benefits will have a greater impact on participation and engagement within your organization, group, business or family.

For more information, please contact
YouthScape HRM
Phone: 902-444-5885 (h)
Website: www.youthscapehrm.ca

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Useful Websites:

Community Foundations of Canada
www.yipcanada.org

Youth Leadership Institute
www.yli.org/philanthropy

CONTACTS

United Way of Halifax Region
Contact: Caitlin Power Hancey
Phone: 902.495.7497
Website: www.unitedwayhalifax.ca

United Way of Pictou County
Contact: Dodie Goodwin
Phone: 902.755.1754
Website: www.pictoucountyunitedway.ca

YouthScape HRM
Contact: Sabrina Poirier
Phone: 902.431.0723
Website: www.youthscapehrm.ca

HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development
Contact: Maria Cain
Phone: 902.444.5885
Website: www.heartwood.ns.ca

Author of Report
Contact: Anna Haanstra
Phone: 902.455.8964